

Document No. 12. U.S. Support for the Brazilian Military Coup d'État, 1964

Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Outgoing Telegram to Ambassador Lincoln Gordon,”

March 31, 1964

In 1964, Brazilian military officers, with the green light from U.S. ambassador Lincoln Gordon, the White House, and the State Department, overthrew President João Goulart (1961–1964). Ambassador Gordon adamantly insisted at the time and later in sworn testimony before a U.S. Senate Committee that “The movement which overthrew President Goulart was a purely, 100 percent—not 99.44—but 100 percent a purely Brazilian movement. Neither the American Embassy nor I personally played any part in the process whatsoever.” Declassified documents released in 1974 revealed that, in fact, the U.S. government had plotted with the Brazilian military to topple the Goulart government and prepared naval and military backing to support the anti-Goulart forces should a civil war break out. Resistance to the military takeover quickly collapsed, and President Lyndon B. Johnson immediately recognized the new military regime that stayed in power for twenty-one years. These State Department telegrams offer a glimpse into the clandestine operations planned from Washington, D.C., to back the generals’ seizure of power.

Telegram No. 1:

ACTION: AMEMBASSY RIO DE JANEIRO

FLASH 1301

MAR 31 2:29 PM '64

NO DISTRIBUTION

FOR AMBASSADOR GORDON

For your personal information only, the following decisions have been taken in order [to] be in a position to render assistance at appropriate time to anti-Goulart forces if it is decided this should be done.

1. Dispatch of US Navy tankers bearing POL [petroleum, oil, lubricants] from Aruba, first tanker expected off Santos between April 8 and 13; follow three tankers at one day intervals.
2. Immediate dispatch of naval task force for overt exercises off Brazil. Force to consist of aircraft carrier (expected arrive in area by April 10), four destroyers, two destroyer escorts, task force tankers (all expected arrive about four days later).
3. Assemble shipment of about 11 tons ammunition, other light equipment including tear gas for mob control for air lift to Sao Paulo (Campinas). Lift would be made with 24 to 36 hours upon issuance final orders and would involve 10 cargo planes, 6 tankers, and 6 fighters.

Unloading of POL by US Navy tankers (item 1) and dispatch of airlift (item 3) would require further development politico-military situation to point where some group having reasonable claim to legitimacy could formally request recognition and aid from us and if possible from other American Republics. Dispatch of tankers from Aruba and of naval task force does not immediately involve us in Brazilian situation and is regarded by us as normal naval exercise.

END

RUSK

Telegram No. 2:

ACTION: Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO 1305 FLASH MAR 31 7:53 PM '64

Info: DEFENSE FOR McNAMARA AND TAYLOR

CIA FOR McCONE

NODIS FOR AMBASSADOR GORDON

Following corrections should be made in Deptel 1301:

- 1) Para one should read: "Dispatch of U.S. Navy tankers bearing POL from Aruba, first tanker expected off Santos April 13; following three tankers at one day intervals."
- 2) Second sentence in para two should read: "Forces to consist of aircraft carrier and two guided missile destroyers (expected arrive in area by April 10), four destroyers, task force tankers (all expected arrive about four days later)."
- 3) Strike words "tear gas" in first sentence of para three, and insert "CS agent."
- 4) Reference to "10 cargo planes" in second sentence of para three should be "six cargo planes."

RUSK

Suggestions for Further Reading

Alves, Maria Helena Moreira. *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

Gordon, Lincoln. *Brazil's Second Chance: En Route toward the First World*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2001.

Huggins, Martha. *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998.

Leacock, Ruth. *Requiem for Revolution: The United States and Brazil, 1961–1969*. Kent State, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990.

Parker, Phyllis. *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention, 1964*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.